October 2024

Birding Observer

Newsletter of the Five Valleys Audubon Society

CALENDAR

Monday, Oct 7th, 6:00-7:45 pm: The board meeting will be held in the Blackfoot Room of the Missoula Public Library.

Monday, Oct 14th, 7:00 pm: Mat Seidensticker of the Northern Rockies Research & Educational Services will present *About Moths* at our October program meeting. See details to the right.

Saturday, October 19th, 10:00 am: Beginning Bird Walk at the Lee Metcalf NWR. Meet the field trip leader at the Visitor's Center and expect two miles of level hiking.

Saturday, October 26th: All-day field trip to Brown's Lake to look for loons and scoters. Meet at 9:00 am in the northwest corner of the Adams Center parking lot. The field trip leaders for this trip will be Andrea Stierle and Margo Stoney.

Unveiling the Ecological Importance of Moths

Please join us at our monthly chapter meeting on Monday, October 14, 2024, at 7:00 PM to hear our speaker Mat Seidensticker present his talk: ***About Moths***.

What about moths? For many of us, moths are the dull boringly brown insects that flutter around porch lights on hot summer nights, or pests that cause damage to vegetation and clothes. Indeed, some moths are boringly brown, and a small percentage are considered pests. However, moths are incredibly diverse, outnumbering butterflies by nine to one and exhibiting myriad sizes, shapes, colors, and wing patterns. They are ubiquitous herbivores, pollinators, and prey, and serve as bioindicators of environmental health in terrestrial ecosystems.

During his presentation, Mat will discuss various moth-related topics including moth natural history, moth identification, similarities between "mothing" and "birding," challenges moths face, and Northern Rockies Research & Educational Services moth-related research on MPG Ranch and the organization's ground-breaking Montana Moth Project.

Mat Seidensticker is a wildlife researcher and Executive Director of the Northern Rockies Research & Educational Services (NRRES). He has broad interests in wildlife research and natural history, holding degrees in Wildlife Biology (BSc, 2000) and Environmental Studies (MSc, 2011) from the University of Montana. Mat developed a passion for moths and other insects during his extensive field experience studying owls and other nocturnal birds with the Owl Research Institute and MPG Ranch. This passion eventually led him to establish NRRES in 2019 to advance scientific research and monitoring of moths and other insects.
The meeting will be held in Room 110 in the Interdisciplinary Sciences Building (ISB) on the University of Montana campus. The building lies on the south end of campus on Beckwith Avenue between Maurice and Mansfield Avenues. Though not required by the university, FVAS respects the decision of those who wish to wear a mask. You may also watch the meeting over the zoom link listed below.

https://umontana.zoom.us/j/98469371354

Peeps From the Board: The Lay of the Land
By Poody McLaughlin

A geography professor once told me that in his introduction to mapmaking class, he assigned the students a project, unsurprisingly, to create a map. But this map needed to represent where the student lived based on natural features of the nearby landscape, no streets included. The student subsequently studied their neighborhood for their residence's distance from rivers, streams, and irrigation ditches and noted elevation changes, landmark trees, and other vegetation. The assignment became a study in biogeographical research and illustration.

In an explosively expanding Missoula, I often overlook my house's location in relation to its natural features. Instead, I use landmarks such as 'Super Walmart is 5 miles from home', or when driving, I choose a bridge over the river that may have less traffic. Mentally, crossing the river becomes a bottleneck in the way of my errands. This is why it's so refreshing to walk near my house at the confluence of Grant Creek with the Clark Fork and be reminded of this watery gift. Or to appreciate my house's adjacent grassland that still hosts a meadowlark pair, hunting kestrels, and this summer, a den of foxes.

Our love for this valley's landscape is overwhelming the natural features that drew many of us here in the first place. The chapter continues to support healthy populations of birds by identifying and advocating for the necessary habitat that they need to survive and thrive.

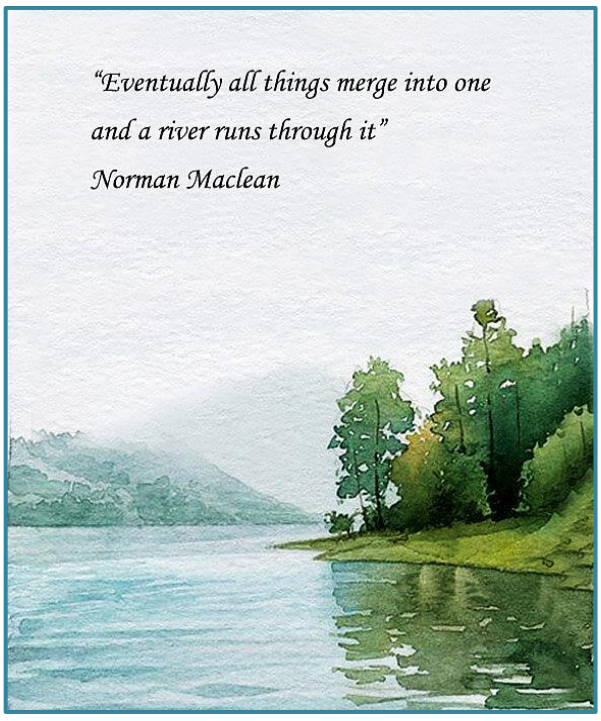
The Fort Missoula area represents many advocacy challenges and opportunities. First, the checkerboard ownership from Sleven's Island downstream to the Fort Missoula Ponds includes private, federal, city/county, and UM owners. Each entity has its priorities and rules. For instance, although hunting isn't allowed on city property, a hunter has built himself a duck blind on Sleven's Island (UM property) where an uncommon Swamp Sparrow once set up territory.

Second, the proposed development on private property, the Old Post Hospital parcel adjacent to Sleven's Island, may again become a hot-button issue. The initial proposal, to build at least 14 condos plus businesses, was voted down due to historical considerations (or lack thereof with the proposed condos and business structures).

Finally, the fate of the city-owned Fort Missoula Ponds remains in limbo. The chapter has organized, and many members have participated in surveys that include a year's worth of data connecting birds with habitat usage. The city will use this data and our reports, along with other completed surveys and public input, to determine how the ponds will be developed and managed. Hopefully, these hearings will occur in late fall or winter.

Overarching the many – and often conflicting – uses and demands of this land is an ongoing effort to designate the Bitterroot River from Sleven's Island downstream to the ponds as the Fort Missoula Natural Area. This natural area would include riparian habitat, which is so crucial to the vast majority of Montana's bird species: residents, migrants, and snowbirds. I envision an area in which protecting and enhancing birds and wildlife would be the priority use. The Clark Fork River-Grass Valley Important Bird Area (IBA), which encompasses all of Fort Missoula, has documented how critical this area is for the conservation of birds. The IBA will be an important tool for future land use decisions here.

Designating a small portion of Fort Missoula as a natural area could have an outsized impact on how the many users of Fort Missoula property perceive this land. Whether they play soccer, tour the native plant gardens, or visit the historical museums or National Forest offices, the anchor could be the beautiful Bitterroot River running through it all.



Summary of All Day Trip to Freezout Lake
By Thomas Kallmeyer

August 24, 2024: Our group of ten departed Missoula shortly after 07:00, made a short stop in Lincoln and then headed to our first birding location, the Bird Tail Rock Historical Marker on Route 200, which did not disappoint. Within a minute of exiting the vehicles, we spotted a young Ferruginous Hawk, which proceeded to entertain us with a flyover lasting over a minute, a dive for prey that was successful and extended viewing while it devoured its meal. All in the group had great looks at this beautiful young buteo. We also noted Northern Harrier, American Kestrel, Barn Swallow, and Western Meadowlark at this location.

We then proceeded to Freezout Lake WMA and birded along the Southeastern shore and the "Thumb" at the lake's Southern end. We were searching for a Hudsonian Godwit, which had been reported recently by multiple birders. A good mix of shorebirds, gulls, and other birds were observed including Marbled Godwits and a group of Sandhill Cranes. We observed each Godwit but couldn't find a Hudsonian Godwit in the mix. Later photos by Alex Kearney revealed we had missed the bird in the field, and it was indeed mixed in with the Marbled Godwits.

Heading North again the group stopped for lunch and then walked the dike at Pond 6 where we found small numbers of shorebirds and waterfowl, along with our only Least Sandpiper of the day. A drive around the auto tour route revealed no shorebirds at the "Neck" and only a few American Avocets on the East shore of Pond 4.

Knowing that most of the reported shorebird activity was taking place on Pond 1, we had left the best for last, when the sun would be in a good position for viewing. The shorebird scene was spectacular! We estimated numbers over 1,100, with about 70% being Lesser Yellowlegs and the rest a mix of Baird's, Pectoral and Stilt Sandpipers along with Red-necked Phalaropes, Greater Yellowlegs, Marbled Godwit, Black-necked Stilt and Dowitchers. The group spent a little over an hour here marveling at the number and diversity of shorebirds before calling it a day and heading back to Missoula.

View our eBird trip report here:
https://ebird.org/tripreport/270538.

Bird Banding at MPG Ranch
By Thomas Kallmeyer

Chapter members had a unique opportunity in September to join scientists from the University of Montana's Bird Ecology Lab (UMBEL) over two days at MPG Ranch to observe and learn about the capture, banding, and study of resident and migratory birds.

We visited the banding station in the flood plain along the Bitterroot River where UMBEL staff provided a comprehensive overview of the capture, banding and data recording process. Species seen in the hand included Song Sparrow, Lincoln's Sparrow, Orange-crowned Warbler, Gray Catbird, White-crowned Sparrow, Wilson's Warbler, Common Yellowthroat and even Hairy Woodpecker!

Five Valleys Audubon Society would like to offer a big thank you to UMBEL staff for their warm welcome and willingness to share their expertise and experiences in banding birds, MPG Ranch for hosting, and Megan Fylling and Will McDowell for facilitating. We plan to repeat these field trips in the Fall of 2025.

Photo of Orange-crowned Warbler by Thomas Kallmeyer

Photo of Ferruginous Hawk by Alex Kearney.

Pablo Reservoir Field Trip Summary
By Rose Leach

September 15, 2024: Eight hearty folks ventured to Pablo Reservoir and nearby wetlands looking for shorebirds on September 15th. We had considered changing our destination to Lower Ray Creek east of Helena, based on few shorebird reports leading up to the 15th. Ultimately, there were enough birds reported in the Mission Valley to make the hour-shorter trip to Pablo.

Shorebirds were a bit sparse, but we did manage to find six species, and they were mostly close enough to study the species well. Our best birds were two Black-bellied Plovers, one adult and one immature, which allowed us to see differences and similarities between the two age groups. This was also a life bird for one of us, which made the viewing all the more special.

Second best was several Sanderlings, which allowed us to see the differences in structure between their generally white plumage with pot-bellied and short-necked stance versus the elongated and sandy brown Baird's Sandpipers. At one spot, we found a group of Long-billed Dowitchers, which we looked over carefully to see if there were any other species in their group. Alas, it was only Long-billeds for us that day.

We did run into some rain and quite a bit of wind, which sent two of us back to the cars at one point. Note to self—remind our field trip participants to dress in layers and expect variable weather during all-day field trips. Also, it would be a good idea for participants to bring walking poles, to navigate the uneven surfaces and a short rocky berm to the mud.

For the day, we tallied 39 species without really checking over most of the eclipse-plumage waterfowl (i.e., brown non-descript ducks). We also had nice views of several Caspian Terns, plus a late-ish Swainson's Hawk. The Swainson's will soon be heading to Argentina, where they spend the winter season. In turn, we await the arrival of our winter-resident Rough-legged Hawks, which move south to join us from Canada and Alaska.

A Reminiscence
By Richard O. Moore

Held in a late season
At a shifting of worlds,
In the golden balance of autumn,
Out of love and reason

We made our peace;
Stood still in October
In the failing light and sought,
Each in the other, ease

And release from silence,
From the slow damnation
Of speech that is weak
And falls from silence.

In the October sun
By the green river we spoke,
Late in October, the leaves
Of the water maples had fallen.

But whatever we said
In the bright leaves was lost,
Quick as the leaf-fall,
Brittle and blood red.

Be an environmental and fiscal champion. If you are able, please sign up for emailed newsletters rather than hard copies.

If you subscribe to Audubon through National Audubon, we may not have your email address. To receive our newsletter and other birding news by email, saving trees and reducing FVAS newsletter expenses, please send your email address to Treasurer, Jean Duncan at treasurer@FVAudubon.org or Membership Promotion Chair, Thomas Kallmeyer at thomas@tarns.net.

Our Newest Members

Reed Benson
Charles Teague
Ronald Wakimoto
Lori Weisse
Tanner Ironpipe
Lauren Hatch
Robert Hance

Join Five Valleys Audubon Society

Please support Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS). There are several ways to donate. All options include the *Birding Observer* newsletter and allow you to participate in all chapter activities. *Please help us reduce our $3,700 annual newsletter cost by signing up for email delivery. FVAS is a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit.

Make checks out to Five Valleys Audubon Society and mail to: PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807
Or donate on our website: https://fvaudubon.org/make-a-donation/

$_____$15 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via email.

$_____$25 FVAS membership, includes newsletter sent via USPS.

$_____Free for students, includes FVAS newsletter via email.

$_____ Donate to our General Fund to support our habitat protection work within Missoula County, nonprofit organizations that care for birds, and education on birds and birding.

$_____ Phillip L. Wright Fund, small grants for student research.

$_____Total contribution

_____ I would like to Volunteer. Please contact me. (Please provide an email address below.)

_____

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: (Required to receive the newsletter and birding alerts via email.) _____

Please note: FVAS does not share email addresses with anyone except Montana Audubon. Your email address is safe with us!

Please be aware that membership in Five Valleys Audubon Society (FVAS) alone does not confer membership in the National Audubon Society (NAS). FVAS and NAS are separate 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations. To become a new member of NAS and receive Audubon magazine (or to renew a current or lapsed membership) visit the website: https://act.audubon.org/a/join. Using this website will ensure that FVAS receives a $20 one-time credit for your NAS membership. All NAS members become members of FVAS. A third organization, Montana Audubon (MTA), is also an independent organization and receives no financial support from NAS. MTA manages statewide issues and is responsible for its own fundraising. To assist in this important statewide work, you may contact MTA through their website: https://mtaudubon.org/. Please give generously to each organization. Although independent, we work together to protect what we all love.

Five Valleys Audubon Society
PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807

NON-PROFIT ORG.
US POSTAGE
PAID
MISSOULA, MT
59807
PERMIT NO. 490

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

TO:

Five Valleys Audubon Society
PO Box 8425, Missoula, MT 59807
www.fvaudubon.org

OFFICERS:			
President, 2024-2027	Rose Leach	(406) 721-0779	rleach370@gmail.com
Vice President, 2023-2026	Jeffrey Ipsen	(406) 493-2586	jeffaipsen@gmail.com
Secretary, 2024-2027	Andrea Stierle	(406) 782-6419	andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu
Treasurer, 2023-2026	Jean Duncan	(406) 396-1171	treasurer@fvaudubon.org
DIRECTORS:			
2024-2027	William Boggs	(406) 274-3880	boggsandfoleylaw@gmail.com
2024-2027	Larry Weeks	(406) 549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
2023-2026	Jim Brown	(406) 549-8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net
2023-2026	Margo Stoney	(248) 921-7328	margo@highmountaincreative.com
2024-2027	Will McDowell		
2024-2027	Susie Wall	(406) 274-0548	susiewall2@gmail.com
COMMITTEES:			
Archivist	Barbara Ross		bjmross@gmail.com
Audubon Adventures	Larry Weeks	(406) 549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Christmas Bird Count	Larry Weeks	(406) 549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Conservation/Planning	Gerhard Knudsen	(406) 251-2765	gmk@bresnan.net
Copy Editor	Cathy Nolan	(206) 920-2288	canolan4@outlook.com
Education	Larry Weeks	(406) 549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Field Activities	Larry Weeks	(406) 549-5632	bwsgenea@gmail.com
Conservation	Jim Brown	(406) 549-8052	brownjs2@bresnan.net
Important Bird Area	Poody McLaughlin	(406) 360-8762	poodymc@gmail.com
Membership Promotion	Thomas Kallmeyer	(406) 214-2971	thomas@tarns.net
Newsletter Circulation	Hedwig Vogel-Wright	(406) 549-7251	hedwigvw@fastmail.fm
Newsletter Editor	Beverly Orth	(303) 944-0183	orthbev@hotmail.com
PL Wright Endowment	Andrea Stierle	(406) 782-6419	andrea.stierle@mso.umt.edu
Program	Susie Wall	(406) 274-0548	susiewall2@gmail.com
Publicity & Website	Thomas Kallmeyer	(406) 214-2971	thomas@tarns.net
Social Media	Vacant		
University Liaison	Chad Bishop	(406) 243-4374	chad.bishop@umontana.edu

Montana Audubon
PO Box 595, Helena, MT 59624
(406) 443-3949
www.mtaudubon.org

Larry Berrin, Executive Director
lberrin@mtaudubon.org

Christian Meny, Director of Conservation
cmeny@mtaudubon.org

Emily Chilcoat, Audubon Center Director
echilcoat@mtaudubon.org

Peter Dudley, Policy & Conservation Ranching Specialist
peter@mtaudubon.org

Boaz (Bo) Crees, Avian Specialist
bcrees@mtaudubon.org

Lauren Smith, Communications Specialist
lauren@mtaudubon.org

Mandi Hinman, Operations Manager,
mandi@mtaudubon.org

Bernie McHugh, Board President